

Athletic Mouthguards

Getting the Bite on Mouthguards

Helmets, knee pads, shin guards . . . if you're an avid athlete or the parent of one, you know the importance of proper protective gear. But did you know that up to 40 percent of all sports injuries involve the face? Protect your smile and your mouth with a comfortable, custom-molded mouthguard to dramatically reduce the risk of sports-related oral injury.

What is a Mouthguard?

A mouthguard is a comfortable piece of athletic gear that fits over your teeth and can help protect your smile as well as your lips, tongue, face, and jaw. New research indicates that mouthguards can even reduce the severity of concussions.

While hockey, boxing, and rugby players would obviously benefit from mouthguards, others, like bicyclists, weightlifters, and gymnasts, made the ADA's list of athletes who need mouthguards. This may sound excessive, but studies show that 13 to 39 percent of all dental injuries are sports related. Because the face is an important part of a person's image, self confidence, and sometimes success, it's better to be safe than . . . toothless!

Before facemasks and mouthguards were required in football, half of all players' injuries occurred in the mouth. During the playing season, players had a one in ten chance of mouth

injury. Once high schools and colleges began requiring facemasks and mouthguards, the number of injuries reported dropped by 200,000 per year. Naturally, dentists and the ADA recommend mouthguards for adults and children in any recreational activity that poses the risk of injury to your mouth.

Types of Mouthguards

- You may have seen ready-made mouthguards in a department or sporting goods store. These generic mouthguards are inexpensive and readily available. Unfortunately, because they are not custom-fitted, they may seem bulky and uncomfortable in your mouth. Ready-made mouthguards are secured by closed jaws which means, when an athlete wears a ready-made mouthguard, speaking and breathing may be difficult.
- If you're looking for something that is more custom fit to your mouth, you might consider mouth-formed mouthguards. Acrylic, shell liner mouthguards provide a comfortable and secure fit over your natural teeth. Unfortunately, many users report that this mouthguard can have an unpleasant odor or taste. It can also harden over time and lose its flexibility. Another type of mouth-formed mouthguard, the thermoplastic style, can be customized by heating it in water, then biting it. It will take on the shape of your bite. While these maintain their flexibility, they can feel bulky.
- The best solution—custom-made mouthguards—are comfortable, practical, and protective. A dentist or lab technician creates the custom-made mouthguard after taking impressions of your teeth. Before you purchase any mouthguard, talk to your dentist. Special mouthguards or

mouth protectors are recommended for patients with braces, removable bridges or dentures, a protruding jaw, or a cleft palate.

Mouthguard Care

Always wear your mouthguard during practice and games. Never chew on it because you may weaken the material and decrease its effectiveness. Holes, tears, and damage to the mouthguard may irritate your gums or soft tissue. If you notice damage, replace your mouthguard immediately.

Before and after each use, check your mouthguard for damage and rinse it with cold water or mouthwash. You should regularly clean your guard with a toothbrush and toothpaste or in a solution of soapy water. Be sure to rinse it well and store it in a firm, perforated container. Avoid placing it in direct sunlight.

Most importantly, you should schedule regular dental check-ups, including one right before your sport's season starts. When you see Dr. Arima, bring your mouthguard and discuss any problems or concerns you may have.

ADA and ASD Advice

The American Dental Association and the Academy of Sports Dentistry recommend mouthguards for athletes who participate in:

Acrobatics	Field Hockey	Racquetball	Softball
Bandi	Football	Rugby	Squash

Baseball	Gymnastics	Shot Put	Surfing
Basketball	Handball	Skateboardi ng	Tennis
Bicycling	Ice Hockey	Skiing	Volleyball
Boxing	Inline Skating	Skydiving	Water Polo
Equestrian Events	Lacrosse	Snowboardi ng	Weightliftin g
Field Events	Martial Arts	Soccer	Wrestling

If you have questions about mouthguards, call us. We'll be happy to help you decide which type of mouthguard is best for you.